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ABSTRACT

This report describes the development, mission, activities, funding, and administrative process of the Education Resources Institute's Higher Education Information Center. The Center, serving Boston and other Massachusetts communities, provides information on the educational opportunities and the availability of student financial aid, as well as encouragement and assistance in the application process, to those students and their families who would otherwise not be able to participate in higher education. Among the Center's services are various youth programs; programs for women who have lost their primary source of financial support through death, separation, or divorce; and a library drop-in service and career learning line. The Center also publishes numerous materials on such subjects as career guidance, locating funding sources, college preparation, and the transition from high school to college. Collaboration is a primary activity of the Center, and tips for building collaborative efforts are listed. In addition, operational and funding aspects of running Center programs and the Center itself are discussed. Finally, the report examines the various considerations and steps required in order to develop such a Center in other communities. (GLR)

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Helping People Discover Educational Opportunities:

The Higher Education Information Center

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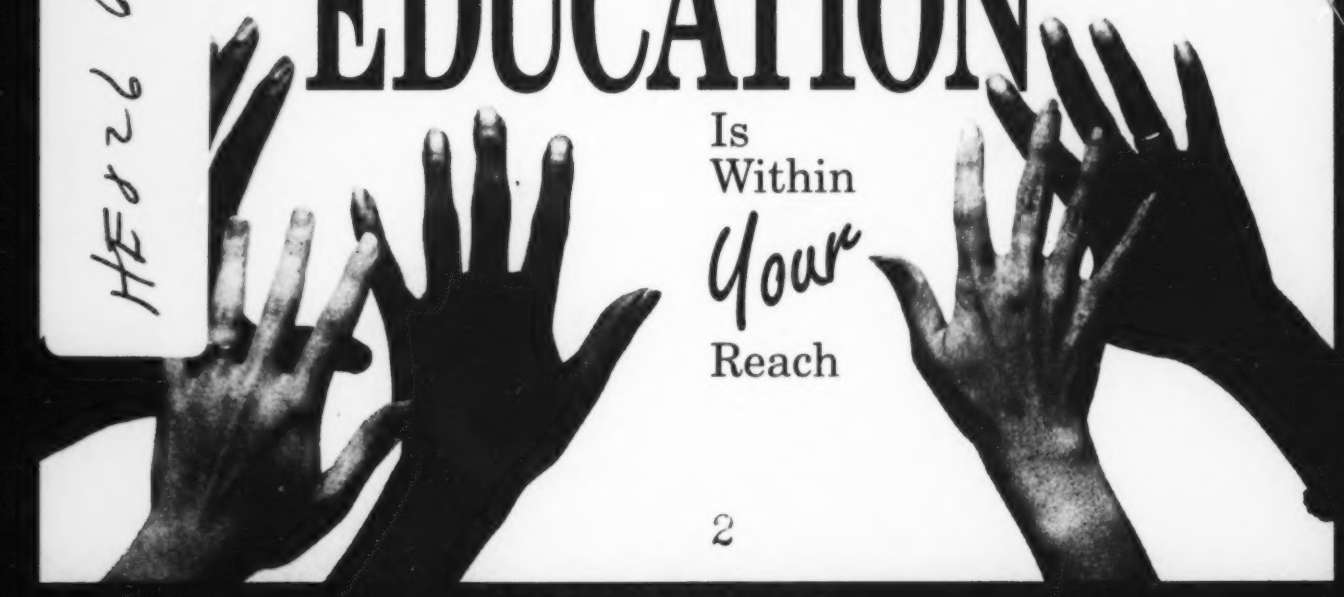
H I G H E R

EDUCATION

Is Within *Your* Reach



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Helping People Discover Educational Opportunities:

The Higher Education Information Center

By Herbert F. Dalton, Jr.

Published by
The Education Resources Institute (TERI)
and the
Plan for Social Excellence, Inc.

Preface

The Higher Education Information Center is the result of a commitment by hundreds of people who believed that young people and adults from all backgrounds should have an opportunity to further their education. These people also recognized the importance of providing information about educational opportunities and the availability of financial aid. Even more, they understood the need to provide people with encouragement and assistance in completing application processes.

The importance of the support provided by the Center's founders also has been crucial to its growth and success. The Jesse B. Cox Charitable Trust provided start up funding. The Boston Public Library's offer of a home for the Center encouraged others to commit financial support for the Center's programs. The American Student Assistance Corporation (formerly Massachusetts Higher Education Assistance Corp.), the Boston Public Schools, the Massachusetts State Scholarship Office, and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission have supported the Center from its inception. Federal funding through a grant awarded to the Worcester Consortium for Higher Education, and more recently a Talent Search grant awarded to The Education Resources Institute (TERI), has been a major resource enabling the Center to fulfill its commitment to serving low income populations.

The contributions of the Center's sponsoring colleges and universities also have been significant. The willingness of 28 Boston area college presidents to support the Center financially has been a critical factor in securing funds from other sources. Sponsoring colleges and universities also have contributed extensively to the Center's educational awareness programs and have hosted thousands of students for campus visits.

Finally, the Center would not be where it is today without the commitment and support of The Education Resources Institute (TERI), our parent organization. TERI's president, Ted Freeman, and the TERI board of directors have consistently supported every aspect of the Center's operation. TERI has ensured a base of financial stability and has encouraged the expansion of the Center's programs to meet community needs. The importance of this unwavering support and confidence in the Center's work cannot be underestimated.

Ann S. Coles
Executive Director
Higher Education Information Center
April, 1993

The Education Resources Institute (TERI)

The Education Resources Institute (TERI) is a national, not-for-profit corporation that provides education financing and information services. Since its establishment in 1985, TERI has helped families throughout the United States finance all levels of education through a variety of innovative financing programs, including low cost loans and a tuition payment plan. TERI also helps students and families learn about educational and financial aid opportunities through the Higher Education Information Center, a division of TERI serving residents of Massachusetts. TERI's offices are located at 330 Stuart Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02116-5237. Phone (617) 426-0681 Ext. 235.

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Plan for Social Excellence, Inc.

The Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. — a private foundation — came into being on March 16, 1990, through the change of name of The Lebensburger Foundation, which had been in existence since October 18, 1961. With the change of name came a change of missions, officers, and staff.

The Plan for Social Excellence has elected as its mission the bringing about of positive and measurable improvements in the areas of education and the environment. It supports projects that explore research results; evaluates and disseminates the results of such projects, and encourages the replication of successful projects.

The objectives of the Plan are put into effect primarily through five activities; seminars, grants, scholarships, technical assistance, and publishing. During its initial phase of activities, the Plan will concentrate on educational matters. At the appropriate time in the future, it will initiate a similar set of activities in areas related to the environment.

The officers of the Plan have elected not to limit its activities to specific geographic areas. It will make grants and provide technical assistance wherever in the United States there is an opportunity to be of help. It will also distribute its publications and disseminate information about its efforts throughout the country.

The offices of the Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. are located at 116 Radio Circle, Mount Kisco, New York, 10549. The telephone number is (914) 241-8690 and the telecopier number is (914) 241-7476.

"The Center is a resource for people who want to improve their lives."

— Cynthia Hairston, Assistant Director of Information and Counseling Services, Higher Education Information Center

CHAPTER ONE:

Making A Difference

On a brisk May morning in 1989, Ann Buchanan, 33, set out on her first visit to the Higher Education Information Center at the Boston Public Library in downtown Boston. She was thinking about applying to college.

"I went to get help filling out my financial aid forms. I was very nervous," recalls Ann. "I'd never followed through on anything in my life. I had no money. I only had my GED; I thought that I was stupid."

Emerging from the T — Boston's subway — station, Ann passed trendy shops and sleek office buildings that surround the Boston Public Library. She went through the Library's revolving doors, traveled down a set of stairs and around a corner and entered the Center.

Inside, thousands of college catalogues, financial aid forms and college videos filled shelves and tables. A dozen people sat quietly, pouring through the materials. Hushed tones were accented in English, Spanish and Russian.

At a table, Ann met Roberta Young, a counselor from the Center. Soon, her life story spilled out.

"I come from a dysfunctional family," Ann told Roberta Young. "I lost a sister to alcoholism. My father's an alcoholic. My brother's a recovering heroin addict. I'm a recovering addict; I went 16 years from my first detox to my last."

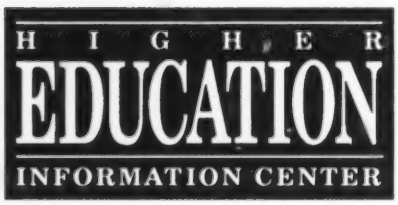
That morning, Roberta helped Ann fill out her financial aid forms. But her assistance went beyond technical advice. "She turned my dream into reality," says Ann, who recently completed her sophomore year at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. "I'd tried to go back to school several times before I met Roberta. I knew what I wanted, and I knew how I wanted to enhance my life. But I

"I'd never followed through on anything in my life. I had no money. I only had my GED; I thought that I was stupid."

didn't know how to go about getting it. Roberta made me feel that I was worth something.

"When I met Roberta, it was like someone opened a door for me. Roberta put me at ease right away. I knew it would work out. I felt like she was a friend.

"When I walked out of that meeting, I felt excited and confident. Things were in motion. I knew I was on my way. Opportunity was going to come."



For nearly a decade, the Higher Education Information Center has meant increased opportunity for thousands of people living in the Greater Boston area and other Massachusetts cities.

The Higher Education Information Center was started in 1984 by a Boston-based group of educational, business and community leaders. It provides free educational and career information and advice to people of all ages and backgrounds — particularly people like Ann Buchanan, who are unfamiliar with the college and financial aid process. There is no other place like it in the country.

"It's Boston's central resource for information on higher education, financial aid and career counseling," says Jody Cale, director of continuing education at Wheelock College and chair of the Center's advisory committee. "It's one-stop shopping — everything people need to plan for further education in one place. Without the Center, people would have to go to five or six different places for the same information. Of the various educational access organizations nationwide, nothing is as comprehensive as the Higher Education Information Center."

In 1992, the Center helped more than 100,000 people in pursuit of higher education, financial aid and careers. More than 25,000 people visited the Center's Boston Public Library offices. More than 21,000 called the Center's toll-free telephone information hot line. The rest were served by information, counseling and outreach programs at public schools and community locations such as churches and youth organizations.

In high schools and middle schools throughout Boston and in 20 other Massachusetts cities, the Center sponsors early education awareness programs for students. The Center also collaborates with businesses, colleges and universities, and social service organizations. The Center publishes informational materials to help those it serves and advocates for policies and programs to improve access to higher education, particularly for under-represented groups.

"When I walked out of that meeting, I felt excited and confident. Things were in motion. I knew I was on my way. Opportunity was going to come."

The Center is a division of The Education Resources Institute (TERI), a private not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing people of all ages with access to educational programs that will enhance the quality of their lives.

"The activities of our Higher Education Information Center are integral to what TERI is and why we are such a valuable resource to students, parents and to higher education institutions," says Ted Freeman, TERI's president who is deeply committed to the Center's goals.

According to a 1989 study, 56 percent of Center users seek financial aid assistance and 43 percent want education information. The overwhelming majority express great satisfaction with the Center's services — 83 percent said "definitely yes" when asked whether they were satisfied. More than half (65 percent) said they never would have applied for financial aid if they had not contacted the Center. Nearly half of these visitors said they would not have completed their financial aid application alone and more than 40 percent would not have completed the admissions process without the Center's help.

As one Boston high school guidance counselor says, "Without the Higher Education Information Center, a whole lot of people wouldn't be going to school right now."

But the Center does more than help people go to college. It paves a path to a brighter future. Many of its users have learned that education means a lot more than a diploma.

"It changed my life," says Ann Buchanan, who swells with emotion when she describes the Center. "I've referred dozens of people to the Center. I've never had anybody be disappointed. I pass it on to my friends at AA meetings and where I work. The best advertising in the world is somebody like me, who's successful because of the Center."

Ann's success has influenced her family and friends. Her sister-in-law is now a full-time student. Her 19-year-old daughter, who recently finished her first year at Suffolk University as a dean's list student, also got help from the Center with her financial aid forms.

"People need someone to tell them 'yes, you can do it,'" says Ann. "It's never too late."

"Without the Higher Education Information Center, a whole lot of people wouldn't be going to school right now."

"One of the fundamental inequities of our society is that those who need the most help get the least."

— Frontiers of Possibility, 1985

CHAPTER TWO:

The Need

An ever-widening chasm separates lower income and minority students from educational opportunity. Boston is typical of many urban school systems — while the student body has changed dramatically in the last two decades, the schools have made only minor adjustments to accommodate students' needs.

Twenty years ago, Caucasians accounted for 55 percent of the school-age population. Today, although 55 percent of the half-million Boston residents are Caucasian, they make up just 25 percent of the school-age population. The percentage of African-American and Hispanic students has doubled, to 48 and 18 percent respectively.

A majority of Boston's public school students come from families with incomes that fall below the federally defined poverty level; close to 60 percent receive AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children); 75 percent are from single parent homes.

Several factors limit the effectiveness of the Boston schools in dealing with this rapid demographic change. One Boston high school counselor explains, "There's a graying, white teacher corps that has difficulty relating to this new population." The absence of bilingual counselors at schools and substantial cuts in funding for public education exacerbate the problem.

A majority of Boston's public school students come from families with incomes that fall below the federally defined poverty level.

Money shortages have meant that information about educational access in the schools is inadequate. Directories and catalogues are outdated. Guidance counselors with caseloads of 300 or more students have many other responsibilities that leave little or no time to adequately support all students planning for future education and careers.

Voluminous national data show a widening gap between the haves and have nots, and nowhere, perhaps, is this more apparent

than in educational resources and services. The 1985 report of the National College Counseling Project, *Frontiers of Possibility*, found that counselor-to-student ratios, as well as other programs, services and resources which create postsecondary educational awareness, correlate with income. Schools with wealthy students have adequate, if not abundant, resources and programs, while schools with low-income students do not.

"Those who need the most help receive the least," states this report about the imbalance of services in schools and society as a whole.

Changes in financial aid policy on the federal level also hurt low-income students. During the 1980s, loans became the primary source of financial aid for education. Funding for grant programs eroded on both the federal and state level. Yet college costs continued to rise at record levels, at both private and public schools. For many low-income students, these changes made higher education seem an unattainable goal.

Low-income students and their families often don't know where to find information on financial aid and don't know how to work through the complex maze of application forms, award letters and promissory notes. Not only is there less money, it has become more difficult to access aid dollars.

Educational access correlates with income: students from low-income families are less likely to graduate from high school and college than wealthier students.

Minority enrollment in higher education as a percentage of total enrollment continues to drop, according to a recent ACT report. If this trend continues, the United States will become an increasingly stratified society in which the gap between those who are educated and those who are not will continue to grow.

Education creates opportunity — in our technological and information driven economy, businesses have an increasing need for an educated workforce. Sixty-five percent of the jobs in Massachusetts require education beyond high school. This percentage increases annually, yet schools are not graduating students who can satisfy today's labor market requirements. In Boston, nearly four out of ten public school students never finish high school, and less than three in ten high school graduates complete a college degree.

Reversing this trend is imperative, and is a primary reason why the Higher Education Information Center is essential.

"We need to help the forgotten half," says Ann Coles, the

Low-income students and their families often don't know where to find information on financial aid and don't know how to work through the complex maze of application forms, award letters and promissory notes.

Center's executive director. "We need to prepare them for the future. Everyone should be able to earn enough money to support a family. We're sometimes criticized for encouraging everyone to go to college. A lot of people just cut kids off too soon. To deprive kids — or adults — of the opportunity to be ready for tomorrow's jobs is wrong!"

Joseph Cronin, president of Bentley College and one of the Center's founders, describes the need he saw more than a decade ago. "You need a guide to get you through the process, usually someone with a college education. If a family member can help you, you have an advantage. If not, the Higher Education Information Center provides a surrogate to lead you through the maze."

"You need a guide to get you through the process, usually someone with a college education. The Higher Education Information Center provides a surrogate to lead you through the maze."

"We were all working with each other. There was tremendous give and take."

— Mario Peña, former Executive Director, Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools

CHAPTER THREE:

The Genesis

Although the Higher Education Information Center opened for business in 1984, the events that spawned it began ten years earlier.

In 1974, the U.S. District Court ordered the Boston public school system to desegregate. The country's eyes turned on Boston, as protests broke out in city neighborhoods. One positive piece of the desegregation plan established links between public schools, businesses and colleges.

These initial collaborations created what Mario Peña, director of the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools in the mid 1980s, terms a "feel-good relationship" with little substantive gain. The presence of collaborating businesses and colleges improved morale, but measures of educational access for students showed little improvement.

In the early 1980s, several visionaries and an array of organizations came together under a formal plan known as the Boston Compact, which established measurable goals for improving the high school graduation, job placement, and college enrollment rates of Boston students. Businesses and colleges agreed to become more involved in the schools, and promised to help achieve these goals.

Robert Schwartz was one of those visionaries. Schwartz, who currently directs educational programs for the Pew Charitable Trusts, recalls, "When the new superintendent of the Public Schools arrived in the summer of 1981, the business community was ready for a city-wide strategy and a leader who would motivate the high school staffs. Discussions the following spring led to the Boston Compact: tying together schools and employers, schools and colleges all in the same package. The higher education agreement was the first time that colleges and individual schools came together around a systemic intervention to improve the schools."

Meanwhile, at the grass roots level concerned practitioners

The presence of collaborating businesses and colleges improved morale, but measures of educational access for students showed little improvement.

began addressing the challenge of providing greater access to higher education for Boston Public School students. Initially, they trained volunteers to help seniors complete financial aid application forms.

The volunteers noticed that many high school seniors were not applying for financial aid because they were unaware that college opportunities existed for them.

The volunteers then began conducting educational awareness workshops for younger students and organized practice SAT sessions. Soon, the volunteers formalized themselves into an organization called the Higher Education Work Group.

Through its efforts, the Higher Education Work Group became aware of the need for a centralized clearing house of education information and application assistance. Members envisioned a place where students could go for help once they got excited about the possibility of going to college. As the demand for educational awareness grew beyond the capacity of this loosely organized volunteer group, members also looked for more structured ways to keep these activities going.

In response, the Massachusetts Higher Education Assistance Corporation, currently known as the American Student Assistance Corporation (ASA), conducted a study to investigate the need, necessary resources and potential structure for a higher education center. The subsequent report argued for a "single comprehensive source of information and assistance on educational opportunities beyond the high school level."

Schwartz shared the report with an official of a Boston foundation, the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust. Impressed with the concept, Cox contributed $70,000 to start the Center. Jody Cale recalls, "The first grant was a one-time deal. A lot of people saw this as a pilot project where there's excitement at the beginning and then the flame burns out. Fortunately, we proved them wrong."

The volunteers noticed that many high school seniors were not applying for financial aid because they were unaware that college opportunities existed for them.

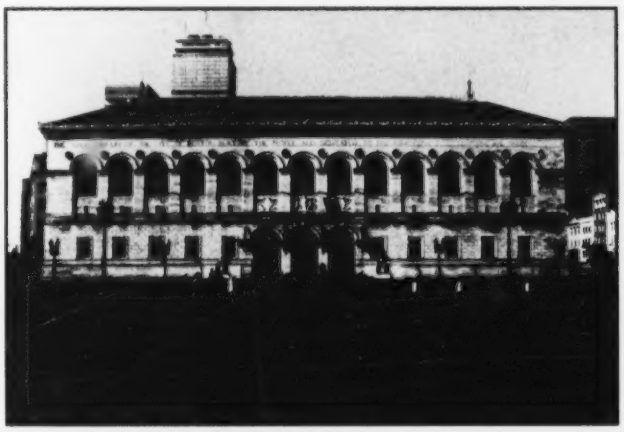
Once initial funding was secured, the next step was hiring a director. The selection committee chose Ann Coles.

Joe Cronin, a member of the selection committee, says, "What we saw in Ann was someone absolutely committed to our goals. She'd been working in access programs for 20 years. She had the experience to run with our idea."

In launching the Higher Education Information Center, Coles faced several formidable tasks: marshaling support, raising operational dollars, finding a place to house the Center and implementing programs.

The first hurdle was finding an accessible location. The proposal to the Cox Trust had stated that the Center would be in a central location, where people from all parts of the city would feel comfortable going.

Grace Bartini, associate director of the Massachusetts Education Finance Agency, recalls, "The first vision was of a store-front information center where people would walk by and be tempted to go in." Joe Cronin says, "We thought about a college; but that would tilt it. It had to be free standing. The Library bothered me until I went to the New York Public Library on 40th Street in Manhattan. After visiting its education and job information center, I realized a library was a logical place."



The Boston Public Library

Once the Boston Public Library contributed free space, Coles began to identify funding sources. The Center scored a key victory early on when the colleges signing the Boston Compact agreement decided to provide support. ASA offered to invest $50,000 if the colleges agreed to a membership dues structure. Joe Cronin recalls: "We pitched it to the college presidents. That turned out to be an excellent stroke. We got disparate colleges to come together, an essential step to winning further support." Colleges contributed funds to the Center according to the size of their student bodies, collectively providing more than $75,000.

Within the first year, two small existing programs with missions similar to the Center's but with limited resources to reach all people needing their services became part of the Center. The Boston Educational Opportunity Center (EOC), a federally funded TRIO program directed toward low-income adults, had been housed at the YWCA with two counselors serving about 400 people a year. The other program was the Career and Learning Line, a statewide toll-free telephone information hot line which was struggling for survival.

With the support from Cox, ASA and the Boston area colleges, and the inclusion of these two programs, the Center's doors opened at the Boston Public Library in late 1984, nine months after planning had begun.

Coles remembers those early efforts. "I often compare what happened to the children's story about the emperor's new clothes. That's how I felt at the time, saying to the EOC staff, 'Come and

"The Library bothered me until I went to the New York Public Library on 40th Street in Manhattan. After visiting its education and job information center, I realized a library was a logical place."

join the Higher Education Information Center.' I was actually asking them to join something which didn't exist, except on paper and in people's minds. But once they joined, the Center flourished."

At first, the Center concentrated on information and counseling services. The drop-in facility — open evenings and weekends — served both young people and adults. Most of the users were adults. A surprising number were people seeking graduate school information, which was not anticipated but logical, because such people usually have no place to go for advice.

The Center also took over and expanded the programs run by the Higher Education Work Group. As success was demonstrated, the Center received funds from the Massachusetts State Legislature to set up educational awareness programs targeting other Massachusetts cities with large concentrations of low-income and minority students.

Establishing effective outreach programs was critical to the Center's early success. Center staff reasoned that the people who most needed the Center's assistance would be least likely to seek it.

"Many adults assume that they are not qualified for college if they haven't finished high school or taken college prep courses, have no money, have been away from school for awhile or don't speak English well," Coles says. "As for high school students, without constant encouragement from caring adults, many don't think beyond what they are going to do next weekend."

The Center's staff immediately began going to schools and community locations, especially to GED and English as a Second Language programs, offering workshops on topics such as "Jobs of the Future" and financial aid. The Center also organized special activities for youth, such as tours of college campuses and college and career fairs.

Establishing effective outreach programs was critical to the Center's early success. Center staff reasoned that the people who most needed the Center's assistance would be least likely to seek it.

Ann Coles talks about the evolution of the Center: "Some people think that we've taken a shotgun approach. But we have a calculated plan. Our goal is to facilitate access to postsecondary education and training, especially for people who don't think they have opportunities. That's not going to happen just by providing information and counseling. Who influences people to make decisions? How do you raise awareness broadly? There's a starting point for everyone. The challenge is to get everyone started. We do this directly — by working with other organizations, by removing obstacles."

"The bottom line is the information and counseling we provide at the Library."

— Ann Coles, Executive Director,
Higher Education Information Center

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Center Today

Confused and unsure where to seek advice, Eduardo entered the Higher Education Information Center in the basement of the Boston Public Library. Eduardo wanted to become an accountant, and knew he must go back to school, but he had no money, little formal training in English and no high school transcript. A Mattapan neighbor and fellow immigrant from the Dominican Republic told him about the Center.

Eduardo approached the reception desk. Timidly, he said, "I want to find a good college for accounting." The young woman introduced herself as Karen and responded in Spanish.

Ten minutes later, Eduardo met Manuel Guerrero — a senior counselor at the Center and himself a Dominican. Manuel suggested three colleges with accounting programs; Eduardo expressed interest in Roxbury Community College because of the proximity to his home. Manuel called the admissions office to set up a meeting for Eduardo. He explained the financial aid process, helped Eduardo fill out financial aid forms and figured out how to obtain a copy of his high school transcript.

The hands-on assistance that Eduardo received is typical of the Center's response to many of the more than 100,000 people assisted each year — eighth graders and senior citizens, new immigrants and graduate school applicants, unemployed and under-employed adults, high school seniors and displaced homemakers.

The Center's programs are extensive and far reaching.

INFORMATION AND COUNSELING SERVICES

The Center's services for people visiting the Library and calling the telephone hotline lie at the core of its programs.

Manuel called the admissions office to set up a meeting for Eduardo. He explained the financial aid process, helped Eduardo fill out financial aid forms and figured out how to obtain a copy of his high school transcript.

Drop-In Services. At the Boston Public Library offices, visitors can meet with counselors or browse through information on postsecondary opportunities, financial aid and careers. The Center's vast information resources include career and educational guides, catalogues, videos, college applications, computerized college and scholarship search programs, and financial aid directories — the depth and breadth of the material offered often astounds visitors. The Center is in many ways a "self-help" facility — visitors can use the resources on their own, speaking with a counselor if they want to. No appointments are necessary; the Center is open evenings and weekends.

"Everything else the Center does emanates from the information and counseling we provide at the Library," says Ann Coles. "If we ever lost our funding, the Library services would be the last to go."

Career and Learning Line. A toll-free telephone hot line makes the Center's assistance available to all Massachusetts residents. Boston Public School guidance counselor Wayne Martin says, "Without getting on the T (subway), by just picking up the phone, people can make things happen."

Angelica, Robert and Rashid are among the 21,000 people who called the Center's hot line last year. Their questions demonstrate the range of information and advice the Center provides.

The Center is in many ways a "self-help" facility — visitors can use the resources on their own, speaking with a counselor if they want to.

- Angelica had a masters degree in computer technology but the Commonwealth of Massachusetts wouldn't certify her to teach industrial arts. She called the hot line and a counselor directed her to a course leading to certification.

- Robert hoped to build his own house. He knew little about carpentry and wanted to take a course in home construction. The hot line counselor identified one at a local community college.

• Rashid was baffled by questions on the Financial Aid Form. He dialed directory assistance and asked for financial aid services; the operator gave him the hot line number. With a counselor's advice, he completed the form.

In addition to its core services, the Center offers counseling targeted to special populations — the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) and the Displaced Homemakers Center.

EOC. The Center operates the Boston EOC, one of six in Massachusetts sponsored by the Worcester Consortium for Higher Education. The EOCs facilitate access to higher education for low-income adults who would be unlikely to further their education without assistance. EOCs provide financial aid information; application assistance; academic, admission and career counseling; and outreach services.

As part of its EOC outreach activities, the Center maintains ongoing relationships with a variety of organizations, such as the Boston Community Schools and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, to help identify adults who could benefit from EOC services. In 1992, the Center helped more than 2,700 people through EOC programs — 66 percent of whom were low-income; of that number, 31 percent were African-American, 17 percent Hispanic and 12 percent Asian.

Displaced Homemaker Center. This program, added to the Center in 1991, serves women in transition who have recently lost their primary source of financial support through death, separation, or divorce. The goal is to help such women become financially self-supporting. With services ranging from personal counseling to life skills workshops, referrals, training programs, internships and job development, this program assisted more than 100 women last year. Satellite offices at several Boston area colleges and the Cambridge YWCA make this program more accessible to women throughout the metropolitan area.

"If it weren't for Displaced Homemakers, I would be on welfare today, I really would," says Elizabeth Dillard, a homemaker recently widowed after 30 years of marriage. With the Center's assistance, Dillard enrolled in Operation ABLE, a job training program for people 55 and older.

Robert hoped to build his own house. He knew little about carpentry and wanted to take a course in home construction. The hot line counselor identified one at a local community college.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

The goal of the Center's Youth Programs is to provide middle and high school students and their parents with the information they need to prepare for higher education. Through outreach locally and across the state, the Center has developed programs and publications helping 65,000 students each year.

Boston Youth Outreach. The Center is committed to improving access to higher education for Boston's youth. Working with Boston public schools and the city's many community organizations, the Center offers a wide range of programs for students and their parents, tailored to meet the needs of individual schools and agencies. Programs include admissions and financial aid workshops for students and parents, peer counseling programs, college fairs, bus trips to colleges and early awareness activities.

The Center aggressively creates partnerships with agencies, businesses and educational organizations, such as the Private Industry Council, the Committee of Hispanic Ministries of Boston and the Black Achievers Program, to develop programs to reach more students effectively.

Robert Clagett, financial aid officer at Harvard College, says, "Every time I've had a conversation with local high school counselors, the Higher Education Information Center rolls off their tongues. It is a normal part of college guidance throughout Boston."

Margaret Zenga, guidance counselor at Snowden International High School, talks about her relationship with the Center. "I make referrals to the Center often. They run programs for our ninth and tenth grades. They provide us with all kinds of materials. I've never been denied help any time I've asked."

"Every time I've had a conversation with local high school counselors, the Higher Education Information Center rolls off their tongues. It is a normal part of college guidance throughout Boston."

Two programs incorporate mentoring. The *Peer Advisor Program* brings college students into ninth grade classrooms to conduct workshops on self-esteem, career exploration, college preparation and decision making. *Dreams and Discoveries*, developed with a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, is a workshop series to help eighth graders explore career interests and future educational options. On the first day, students are asked to "dream" about their lifestyles at age 25 and to share their visions with the rest of the group. Students hear professionals from backgrounds similar to their own talk about their careers and how they prepared for them. They also visit a work site and a college, and receive a computer printout which matches career possibilities to the student's profile.

Response from middle school students indicates that the program is successful. After a visit to IBM, Edgar Zayas wrote, "This trip

makes me think that it's time to stop hanging out in the street and open up my books and study." Kim Ennis, who visited *The Boston Globe* with the youth awareness program, wrote, "I learned that you need college to get ahead."

Educational Talent Search. Also a federally funded (TRIO) program, Talent Search counselors work directly in schools with 600 middle and high school students, helping them develop and follow individualized educational plans which lead to postsecondary enrollment. Students who have the potential for college achievement but require additional help and encouragement are eligible for Talent Search. With younger students (grades 7 to 10), counselors emphasize the importance of education for future successes and the need to take college preparatory courses in high school. Students participate in career exploration and self-esteem building workshops and visit college campuses for special activities. They also meet with counselors individually to review their academic performance and get help with problems.

"We realized that many of the students we serve needed more follow-up and individual counseling than our general outreach program could provide," says Coles. "With Talent Search we now can provide the constant encouragement and repeated exposure to opportunities that kids need."

Statewide Youth Educational Awareness Program. This is one of the Center's most wide-reaching efforts, promoting educational awareness initiatives in 20 cities across Massachusetts. The program brings together volunteers from public schools, higher education, community agencies and businesses to inform youth about postsecondary education, career options and financial aid. The Center provides local steering committees — guidance counselors, teachers, youth group leaders and college administrators — with ideas, technical support and materials.

For example, in the city of Gardner, located in north central Massachusetts, the Center helped establish a committee that provides educational awareness activities for middle school students.

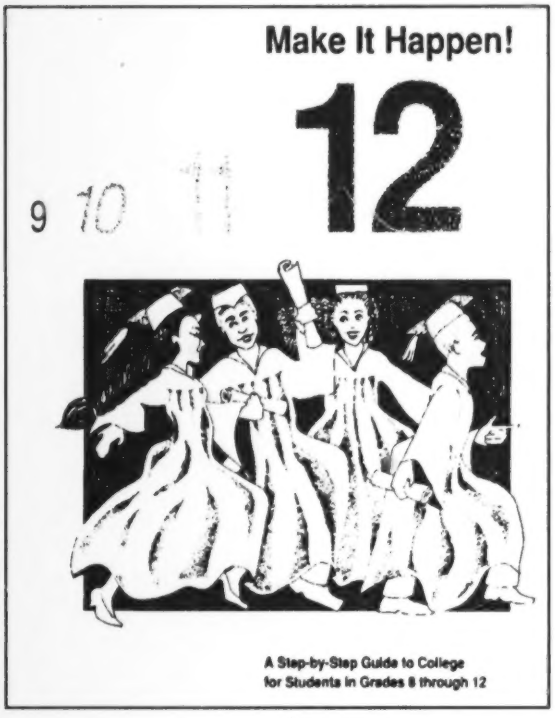
Mike Edwards, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Mt. Wachusett Community College in Gardner, describes his community "as an economically deprived city with a large population of kids who are the first generation to go to college." The Gardner early awareness committee pulled together people working with kids to pool their resources and targeted eighth graders. Early awareness workshops used corporate and college volunteers who shared their personal experiences with students and helped them understand the importance of higher education. Edwards says, "If it hadn't been for

"We realized that many of the students we serve needed more follow-up and individual counseling...with Talent Search we now can provide the constant encouragement and repeated exposure to opportunities that kids need."

the Statewide Youth Educational Awareness Program, our efforts would be scattered, haphazard."

PUBLICATIONS

Another way the Center spreads the word is through its many publications. The Center has placed a strong emphasis on developing and distributing educational awareness publications that not only answer questions but provide a clear understanding of the process leading to higher education.



In *Make It Happen!*, for example, students are given practical suggestions for what they can do each year they are in school to prepare for college. Eighth grade students are advised to "tell your parents, counselor, clergy, homeroom teacher and any other adult you respect that you are going to college. The more people you tell, the more support you will have to help you reach your goal." Ninth graders should "Do your best in school. Grades count, but don't drop a college preparatory course just because you are having trouble. If a course is difficult, get help from a teacher or ask for a tutor."

In 11th grade, students are advised to "make a file for information about scholarships, eligibility requirements and deadlines. Start early, because it takes a long time to research scholarships."

Most publications are distributed through educational awareness workshops, college fairs and financial aid nights. People visiting the Center facilities and calling the hot line can also get the materials. Publications are free for individuals and for schools and community groups in cities targeted by the Center's programs.

In addition to education awareness materials, the Center publishes *Educational Opportunities of Greater Boston for Adults*, the only directory of its kind in the United States. Originally published by the Educational Exchange of Greater Boston, this 300-page book lists more than 8,000 part-time courses for adult learners and is sold for a nominal cost. It is used by people interested in changing careers or pursuing leisure time options; counselors assisting people who want to develop new skills; and human resource managers helping employees locate job related courses.

To help underwrite the cost of the book, the Center raises funds from schools listing courses in the directory as well as from Boston area corporations.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Ensuring educational access involves more than simply providing information, counseling, workshops and publications. Barriers to access also must be addressed. In addition to direct services, therefore, the Center engages in efforts to shape public policy to facilitate access.

Staff members have served on national and regional committees, published articles in national journals and presented at the annual conferences of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, the College Board, and the National Council of Educational Opportunity Associations. They have provided testimony before state and federal lawmakers regarding legislation affecting access to higher education.

Higher Education Information Center Publications

Make It Happen!: A step-by-step guide to college preparation for students in grades 8-12.

Moving On: A guide to the college application process for high school juniors and seniors.

Opening Doors to the Future: A high school planning guide for parents of middle school students.

What Will I Do With My Life? A career guide for seventh to tenth grade students that lists various occupations by type of work and educational requirements.

Helping Kids Make Choices: An early education curriculum guide for middle school teachers.

Locating Scholarships from Private Sources: Helpful hints and information on the scholarship search process.

Education Loan Comparison Chart: Information on different types of education loans for students and parents.

Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities: A brochure highlighting special considerations for students with disabilities.

Ed Lib: A quarterly newsletter for counselors, human service workers, high school and college staff and others in Massachusetts concerned with encouraging people to further their education.

Coles says, "We always need to find the larger context. What are the obstacles, from our experience, in working with people? Why aren't kids completing financial aid forms? We look to the every day struggles of the people we serve and try to understand the implications. Our job is to work on problems people face in securing educational opportunities. To make sure, for example, that there will be money for that seventh grader when he graduates from high school."

Part of removing barriers is advocating for change that will facilitate access. "We're involved in the school reform discussions in Boston. If schools don't offer good education, then the benefit of the information we provide is lost," says Coles.

The Center also advises national access efforts and conducts related research projects. Recently, the Congressionally appointed National Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance asked the Center how to better reach parents of younger students to show them that financial aid makes college affordable. "They wanted to know what would and wouldn't work," says Coles. She made various suggestions based on the Center's experiences working with families.

CHALLENGES TO MANAGING PROGRAMS

Despite many success stories, the Center faces challenges in managing programs effectively.

Scheduling adequate counselor coverage is never simple — by offering a walk-in service, it is hard to anticipate busy periods and minimize waiting. Staff realizes that scheduling would be simpler if clients made appointments, but many users would never come if appointments were required.

The demands on staff time are enormous, and burn-out is a constant threat. The staff must hold workshops and other events at all hours, on weekends and evenings. "With their deep-felt commitment to community service, it is easy for some staff members to get stretched too thin," notes Coles.

"We look to the every day struggles of the people we serve and try to understand the implications. Our job is to work on problems people face in securing educational opportunities."

Keeping up to date with all the information related to planning for postsecondary education is another challenge. Counselors must stay abreast of training requirements for particular occupations, financial aid regulations which change annually, and a growing array of degree and non-degree programs. "This is a lot of information for everyone to keep track of," Coles points out. "We have resisted the temptation to have people specialize, because we want to respond immediately to individual requests for information and assistance.

For many people seeking our help, it has taken a lot of courage to call or visit and when we are not able to assist them immediately, sometimes they do not return."

Counselors also are charged with following up on the clients they serve. "This is very important but hard to provide with a limited staff and a constant flow of new people seeking help," Coles admits.

In terms of offering programs in schools, the Center must deal with the bureaucratic obstacles typical of educational institutions. School administrators struggle to deal with a legion of challenges in educating students; asking them to coordinate with an outside group like the Center often meets resistance. Teachers are sometimes reluctant to release students from class, even for worthwhile activities, particularly those who are below grade level in basic skill areas. Scheduling educational awareness programs to match the rigid school schedule can also be difficult.

"With their deep-felt commitment to community service, it is easy for some staff members to get stretched too thin."

"When someone else wants to do what we're doing, that's always an opportunity for us, not a turf issue."

— Ann Coles, Executive Director,
Higher Education Information Center

Chapter Five:

Collaboration: Key To Survival

In the winter of 1991, Boston's 15 teaching hospitals launched a four-month campaign to attract people to health careers. Posters were placed in subways and buses that directed those interested in health careers to call the Center's information hot line. Hospital representatives trained Center staff about health careers so that they could answer questions and direct callers. The initiative generated more than 600 phone calls.

"It's wonderful how the teaching hospitals and the Center were able to work together to fight massive shortages in the health professions," says Deane Coady, manager of employment and training at Children's Hospital.

Subsequently, Children's Hospital asked the Center to conduct workshops on paying for college for its employees who are thinking about going back to college or are unsure about how to manage their children's college costs.

Three years ago, the Center began collaborating with the Massachusetts Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators to link its annual financial aid hot line with the Center's own hot line. The Financial Aid Hot Line, which previously had rotated among Boston area colleges, now operates during January and February evenings using the Center's 800 number.

College financial aid officers volunteer to staff the hot line on winter evenings, but now people who call at other times can still get the help they need. A local property management firm provides free parking for the volunteers and a bank underwrites advertising costs. The new arrangement brings more visibility to the Center and, as Ann Coles says, "It's solidified relationships with an important constituency for us — financial aid officers. More importantly, the

"It's wonderful how the teaching hospitals and the Center were able to work together to fight massive shortages in the health professions."

hot line now better serves students and parents."

The collaborative efforts with Boston hospitals and financial aid professionals are typical of how the Center innovatively serves its clientele and secures needed program resources: Collaboration has been the cornerstone of the Center's success. Since its inception, the Center has worked closely with educational, institutional, business and community groups to develop new programs, many of which are ongoing.

• The Center's symbiotic relationship with its "landlord," the Boston Public Library, is a prime example of effective collaboration. "The Center's services complement what public libraries are trying to do," says Liam Kelly, associate director of the Boston Public Library. Not only does the Center bring people "who could use our services" to the Library, says Kelly, but many of the people using the Library's social science department for questions about education now have a significant additional resource.

In return, the Center receives rent-free space in an ideally located setting. "The space is comfortable for the people the Center serves. If the setting were pristine and formal, some might say, 'I don't belong here'," says Judy Allen from the College Board. "I love the idea it's in a library. It says something about education."

• For local businesses interested in promoting access to educational opportunity, the Center serves as an important resource. Employers participating in the Boston Private Industry Council's summer jobs program host educational awareness workshops for students at the workplace and bring students to the Center for tours. The Center works with *The Boston Globe* to offer college planning workshops throughout eastern Massachusetts. These workshops feature financial aid and admissions directors from member colleges to help families understand college selection, financial aid and admissions application processes.

• A collaborative undertaking with the College Board has made it easier for people to locate private scholarships. The Center contributed its expertise to developing a national computerized financial aid database produced by the College Board called College Cost Explorer FUND FINDER, which is designed to streamline the search for private scholarships and make such information more widely available. TERI and ASA also participated in this collaborative effort by partially underwriting the development costs.

• Area colleges are important partners. Center staff arrange for colleges to host monthly in-service meetings for Boston Public School guidance counselors. These occasions provide an opportu-

"The space is comfortable for the people the Center serves. If the setting were pristine and formal, some might say, 'I don't belong here.' I love the idea it's in a library. It says something about education."

nity for guidance counselors and admissions officers to establish and strengthen working relationships, share information and learn more about each other's students and programs.

In conjunction with the University of Massachusetts/ Boston, the Center sponsors the annual Greater Boston Adult College Fair with more than 50 schools represented. The Center also co-sponsors the Career School Expo, at which Boston area high school students can talk to more than 50 career school and training program representatives.

Harvard College financial aid officer Robert Clagett is one of many college administrators who collaborates with the Center in offering educational awareness programs. Clagett uses Center publications to work with middle school children and parents in the Boston area. And the Center's staff has trained a cadre of Harvard students to be interns in middle schools.

Twenty-eight Boston area colleges pay annual membership dues to help support the Center's work. The Center provides technical

TIPS ON EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Collaborating with diverse groups is a constant challenge and must be done with sensitivity to all parties involved:

- Clearly delineate responsibilities early on. Unless roles are clarified, one collaborator assumes the other is doing something — and nothing gets done. Collaborators need to anticipate problems in advance and decide who is responsible for what.
- Decide from the start who is in charge. It is easy to commit to a new program; the real work comes in implementation. Avoid assigning implementation to people who were not involved in the decision to undertake a project. They already may be burdened with responsibilities and won't be fully committed to the new endeavor.
- Credit good work. It is often impossible to make sure that all groups involved with a project gets due credit for their contribution. "Collaborators don't always have control over this issue, so they need to be both thick-skinned and patient with each other," Coles observes. She cites this example: the Boston Public Library frequently gets more publicity for having the Center than does TERI, the Center's sponsoring organization. "It is important to find ways to give credit to everyone involved in a collaborative project, but at the same time partners need to be accepting of the fact that they will not always get the recognition they deserve."
- Keep in mind the common focus and need for collaboration — helping people.
- Be willing to compromise. Collaborators must be willing to compromise with others for the effort to work.

"Partnerships work best when each partner thinks he is giving 60 percent and is patient and flexible in relation to the others," Coles says. "Mistakes are inevitable, so it is crucial that collaborators trust and respect each other enough to allow mistakes."

assistance to member colleges interested in increasing the number of low-income and minority students. Students enrolled in member colleges may become peer advisors in the Center's early awareness programs. Admissions representatives occasionally use the Center's Boston Public Library offices to meet with prospective students and parents.

Mario Peña believes that the Center's approach to collaboration sets it apart and rejuvenates it. "The constantly expanding services and programs combined into the Center give the user and staff a sense that here is a place where things can happen."

Ann Coles explains the Center's rationale for collaboration: "Working with businesses and other organizations ensures that a wide range of individuals can access the Center's services and benefit from educational opportunities. We can be much more cost-effective and offer stronger programs."

Coles talks about the Center's contribution in a collaborative voice, "The Center cannot do it alone." Her approach to collaboration is pragmatic: "Some people start with a big plan, with lots of committee meetings and long discussions about formal agreements. Our approach is informal. Whenever opportunities arise, we just act upon them. We don't get bogged down in the mechanics of collaboration. What we care about is people securing opportunities that will help them; the rest doesn't matter."

"The constantly expanding services and programs combined into the Center give the user and staff a sense that here is a place where things can happen."

**"Most organizations become complacent.
But the Center's staff has the same sense of enthusiasm —
the hopeful look in people's faces still exists."**

— Mario Peña, former Executive Director,
Boston Plan for Excellence
in the Public Schools

CHAPTER SIX:

The Mechanics

Operating and funding the broad array of services and programs offered by the Center is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle with countless interlocking pieces. For the Center to run effectively, money must be raised, a staff of qualified employees must be maintained, and comprehensive outreach and publicity programs must be developed.

FUNDING

"My annual budget is about $1 million," explains Ann Coles. "This supports the activities of 18 full-time and 32 part-time staff members. Originally, when the Center had a staff of five full-time and three part-time people, the budget was $200,000."

The Center derives its funding from many sources. TERI, the Center's parent organization, contributes approximately 40 percent of its annual budget. Included in this figure is interest from a $1 million endowment contributed by ASA.

About 30 percent of the budget comes from federal grants for the EOC and Talent Search programs. Most of the balance comes from various sources, including the Higher Education Coordinating Council in Massachusetts and other state agencies, the Boston Public Schools, and member colleges and universities.

For the Center to run effectively, money must be raised, a staff of qualified employees must be maintained, and comprehensive outreach and publicity programs must be developed.

The member colleges contribute according to a formula based on the size of their full-time undergraduate enrollment, with minimum dues of $1,000 and maximum dues of $8,000.

The Center also generates income by contracting with organizations to provide specific services. An example is an early awareness program for sixth grade students called *Kids to College*, which the Center organized under contract with the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts and a grant from Sallie Mae.

The foundation and corporate grants received by the Center are usually for particular projects.

• The New England Education Loan Marketing Corporation (Nellie Mae) has provided funding for the Center's college bus tours for Boston students and the development of the *Make It Happen!* brochure.

• IBM has provided funds for the Center to expand outreach services to low-income adults and has loaned computers for educational awareness programs.

• The Carlisle Foundation made it possible for the Center to collaborate with Mujeres Unidas, a community based organization, to develop and pilot career exploration workshops for Latina women.

In-kind contributions amount to $110,000 annually. The largest contribution is the space provided by the Boston Public Library. The Library also lets the Center use its conference rooms, auditorium, and audiovisual equipment. In addition, Houghton Mifflin provides the Center with its Guidance Information System, a computerized guidance package which enables people to conduct college, career and financial aid searches. The College Board provides the Center with College Explorer and College Cost Explorer FUND FINDER.

The Center's money stream is not secure, and so the staff must constantly work at fund-raising.

"In raising money for the Center, we face a highly competitive funding environment," Coles says, "both to maintain our current funding sources and to raise new money as our programs grow and more people seek assistance. Most of our money is year-to-year funding, except for TERI's support and the ASA endowment income."

Other funding challenges the Center faces are securing support for its core services and maintaining interest in programs when they are no longer new. Many foundations will provide seed money for a program and then stop their support. "How do you continue to be compelling enough for people to support?" asks Coles. "We try to do

IBM has provided funds for the Center to expand outreach services to low-income adults and has loaned computers for educational awareness programs.

that by looking for new opportunities that are closely related to our mission and enhance our capacity to serve the Center's target population."

Raising money is crucial to the Center's success in fulfilling its mission. Coles explains, "It is important that our services are free of charge. The people who need them the most cannot afford to purchase such services."

By using volunteers, the Center stretches its resources. Volunteers are used extensively in the youth outreach programs. The Center runs a speakers bureau with more than 35 participants. Member colleges provide volunteers to help with programs.

STAFF

Most of the Center's work is done by a dedicated, highly informed staff of 50 people — 18 full-time and 32 part-time employees.

Coles says, "Our staff is well qualified, well trained, and reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. They are multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-lingual."

Judy Allen, who heads the New England Office of the College Board, says of the Center's staff, "Service is first and foremost. They care about students, care about them succeeding. They work off the high expectation principle: you're here to go to college; I'm here to make that happen."

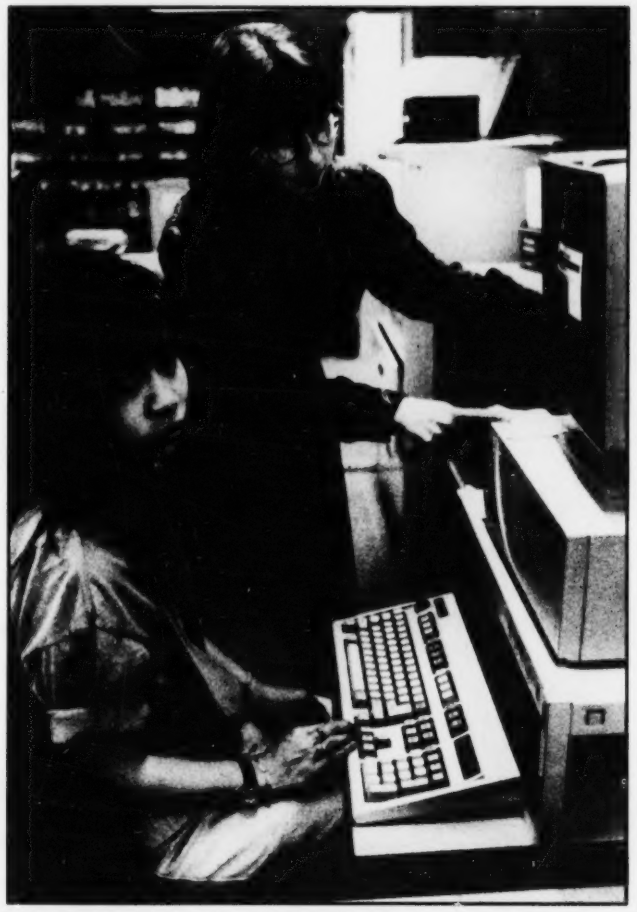
Although the Center looks for people with masters degrees, experience is the key quality. Coles explains, "We want counselors and youth program specialists to have experience with the target populations. Some have been teachers, admissions officers, financial aid officers. They have experience in manpower training, career training, youth outreach, adolescent care, working with troubled kids. We also look for people with a strong customer service orientation."

"It is important that our services are free of charge. The people who need them the most cannot afford to purchase such services."

Program specialists need strong organizational and communication skills. "They need to juggle different programs at different stages of development," Coles says. "They have to be sensitive to the special needs of students. They have to ask, what will motivate students to act on the information I am providing. They have to be creative and dynamic speakers, able to find unconventional ways to capture kids' interest."

A background in pre-college counseling is not an essential

qualification for staff. "They must have a high degree of motivation and understand the importance of reaching the Center's target communities," Coles says. "With solid training we are able to provide them with the knowledge they need to do college and career counseling."



All staff members get extensive training. New counselors receive at least 12 hours of formal training and "apprentice" with experienced staff to learn "on-the-job." The Center's leadership also emphasizes on-going staff development. Counselors participate in workshops sponsored by the College Scholarship Service and ASA, for example, to keep up to date on the financial aid delivery system.

A recent evaluator of the Center's services observed that the staff is eager and happy to help visitors, creating a warm, friendly atmosphere at the Library offices.

The staff frequently takes that extra step, helping a client beyond the original request. Cynthia Hairston, assistant director of the Center's information and counseling services, tells about an impoverished client who had difficulty finding postsecondary placement. Not only did Hairston help her access schooling, but she also helped her locate a job at a nearby fast-food restaurant. In what are common actions for Center staff, one counselor identified a client's learning difficulties and directed her to the University of Massachusetts' Developmental Studies Program, and another helped resolve immigration difficulties.

One reason for the Center's success is the way staff members mirror the population they serve. They have varied life experiences, enabling them to empathize with the difficulties in their clients' lives. "They know the answers," says Mario Peña.

"We deal with unpredictability," says Jane Collins, who manages the Center's counseling staff. Perhaps it's the unpredictability or the new challenges that keep the staff committed and focused.

The Center is bottom-heavy with staff who provide direct services. Of the 50 employees, just four comprise the management team — the executive director, two department directors and one assistant director. One department director handles all the information and counseling services at the Boston Public Library site, including the telephone hot line and outreach to adults. The other department director manages the youth programs.

Management oversight is provided by TERI's president and board who have actively encouraged and supported the Center's growth over the years.

Monitoring the Center's programs to ensure they respond to the needs of the target populations is its Advisory Committee, a group of 28 that meets three times annually. Members include representatives from the Boston Public Schools, sponsoring colleges and other constituencies that support the Center, parents and high school students. The committee serves as a sounding board by providing technical and professional advice to Coles and her staff. The committee's diverse membership ensures the Center's responsiveness to the populations it serves.

OUTREACH AND PUBLICITY

Extensive outreach programs and effective publicity are also important to the Center's success.

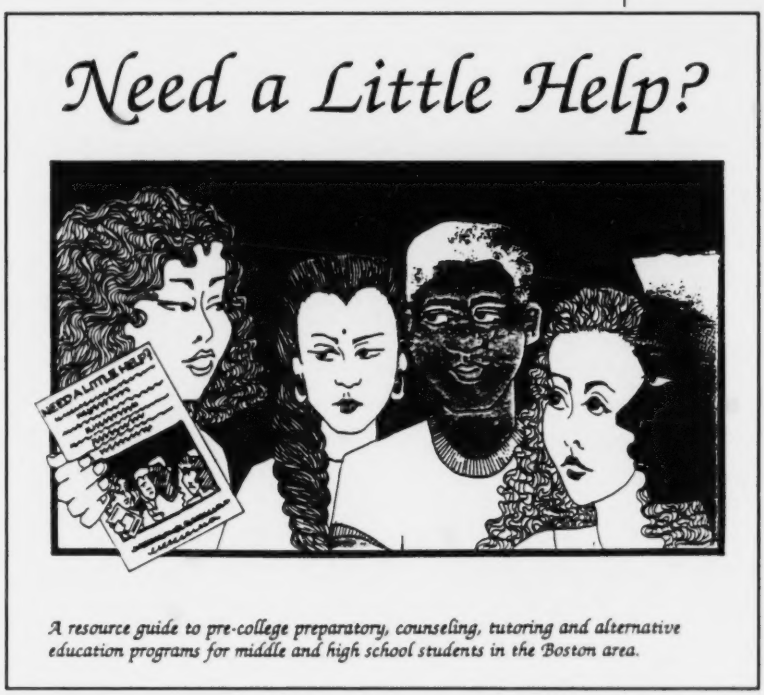
Coles explains the Center's philosophy about outreach. "We're taking the information about opportunities — about financial aid, careers, colleges, and our counseling services — to the communities and schools. We want to make the information highly accessible. Staff go to GED programs, substance abuse programs, parenting organizations and community action agencies.

"Sometimes the groups come to us, but more often we have to approach them and offer our services," says Coles. "We have to constantly remind people that the Center is alive and eager to serve."

"We're taking the information about opportunities — about financial aid, careers, colleges, and our counseling services — to the communities and schools."

Cynthia Hairston believes the Center is reaching more of its targeted population today than ever before. "We're better known. Referrals are coming from dozens of agencies that serve our target population," she says.

In addition to extensive outreach efforts, the Center uses the media effectively. "We publicize educational and financial opportunities, and not just the Center's services," says Coles. The Center has no advertising budget, and so relies on press releases and public service announcements.


Need a Little Help?
NEED A LITTLE HELP?
A resource guide to pre-college preparatory, counseling, tutoring and alternative education programs for middle and high school students in the Boston area.

"We appear in newspaper articles on how to pay for college, select a career, train for non-traditional careers," says Coles. "We send out two or three press releases a year, and do public service announcements on television and radio."

The Center constantly seeks free advertising. Its telephone number appears in many state publications about education, training and financial aid opportunities. State agencies, legislators, community organizations, schools, colleges and the media provide the telephone number. Posters with tear-off sheets giving the Center's phone number and hours are displayed in locations statewide including libraries, schools, welfare offices and human services agencies. Attend a college fair in Boston, and the Center will be there — whether it be the Black College Fair, the Hispanic College Fair or the Adult College Fair. The Center's newsletter, Ed Lib, is sent to 4,000 agencies, schools and libraries and contains information on Center services and educational, career and financial opportunities.

EMPHASIS ON QUALITY

Two key elements to all of the Center's efforts are the emphasis placed on quality and integrity of its programs. Coles explains, "We place a high priority on quality. We want our information resources to be up-to-date and accurate. We want our clipping files and pamphlets well organized so that people can find the information they want quickly and easily.

"We want our staff to be well-informed, sensitive to the needs of the diverse populations of the Center. They need to communicate effectively with other people over the telephone and in person; they need to be dependable, to show up at the scheduled time and be well-prepared.

"The Center's concern about integrity and quality reflects the customer service orientation the staff takes to everything it does. We try to provide the best program or service to everyone seeking our assistance," says Coles.

"The Center's concern about integrity and quality reflects the customer service orientation the staff takes to everything it does."

"It's hard to imagine who doesn't benefit; the Center makes Boston a better place for everyone."

— Wayne Martin,
Boston Public Schools
Guidance Counselor

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Beneficiaries

Ricardo advanced to the microphone. Before him sat a fidgety audience of middle school students. Facing them, Ricardo recollected when he dropped out of school 18 months ago and moved to New York City. School, said his friends, was not the place to be. They told him he could earn money, buy a car and a house much quicker without school. He just needed to get started.

His friends were wrong. Ricardo couldn't find work. He lived on the streets. "The streets are filled with prostitutes, pimps, and druggies. They'd just as soon slice your face as look at you." You could hear a pin drop as Ricardo connected with an audience of urban middle school students, most of whom were sitting on their seat's edge.

Ricardo and three other panelists — all of whom had beaten the odds and gone to college — told the adolescent audience to stay in school. "Any of you who knew me before must think it's weird to hear me say: 'Stay in school.' But that's where the action is."

Ricardo returned to Holyoke High School just two months after leaving for New York City. He struggled through his last year of high school but hung in to get his diploma. Now he's enrolled at Holyoke Community College.

This panel discussion was part of the Center's Statewide Youth Educational Awareness Program. It demonstrates the wide reaching impact of the Center.

The Center does not just benefit low-income high school students who live in Boston. The Center helps middle school students, college-bound teenagers and adults throughout Massachusetts. High school guidance counselors, college financial aid officers and other educators also benefit from Center programs.

"Any of you who knew me before must think it's weird to hear me say: 'Stay in school.' But that's where the action is."

"It's good for our state, a model for similar programs nationally," says TERI president Ted Freeman.

The Center has been successful in reaching its target audience — the population typically overlooked by the educational establishment. Margaret Zenga, guidance counselor at Snowden, says, "It's not just for those kids who plan to go on to college from the beginning. It's for kids who need a little extra encouragement."

To get an idea of the wide range of people served at the Center, consider the people who walk into the Center on any day.

• When Kathryn, 28, had problems filling out her Financial Aid Form, her social worker at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission recommended the Center. She's now a junior at Northeastern University, and in each of the last three years, the Center helped her complete her forms. Kathryn remarks, "The whole financial aid process is so intimidating. You have to prove you're independent. You have to prove you're poor. If it hadn't been for the Center, I never would have gone to college."

• Alexander dropped out of Brighton High School halfway through his senior year. "Out on the street, with no place to turn," says the Center counselor who worked with him, "he came to the Higher Education Information Center. We checked his transcript and found that he was within two classes of getting his diploma. He didn't know it." Last summer Alexander finally got the credits he needed. Says his counselor, "He'll graduate and be eligible to sign up for the Marines, where he can get training for the law enforcement field. His life has opened up."

• Ulyses is 44 and homeless; he resides in a shelter in Boston. With no income and no mailing address, Ulyses faced a route to higher education fraught with barriers. Ulyses first came to the Center as a last resort: no one had been able to help him attain his GED certificate. Later he returned for help with financial aid forms. He now is studying at Roxbury Community College.

• Galena and Osip, 62 and 63, immigrated to the United States from the Soviet Union. Eight months after their arrival, they visited the Center to find out about English as a Second Language programs and financial aid. A counselor helped them find their way through a maze of paperwork and enroll at Bunker Hill Community College.

• A recent divorce adversely affected the income of Linda, 50: "I saw education as the only way to put my life back together." Linda will graduate from Simmons College next year. She needed ongoing help with her financial aid application and made five visits to the Center. "Without that help, I wouldn't have made it," says Linda.

"The whole financial aid process is so intimidating. If it hadn't been for the Center, I never would have gone to college."

More than 40 percent of those who use the Center are people of color. The typical profile of a Center visitor is young (age 17 to 30), lower income and urban. About 60 percent of Center visitors are out of high school, while two-thirds of telephone inquiries are made by parents looking for financial aid information for their children or by adults who plan to go back to school and need college, career or financial aid information.

John Diggins, Boston Public School's senior advisor for guidance services, says that "the Center is the only show in town during our summer shut down time." For two months, no one is available in the schools to help students and families deal with higher education access questions. Diggins says that when he receives calls from people about college and financial aid during the summer, "I send them to the Center. It's a Godsend."

Many communities have benefited from the youth awareness programs.

A few years ago Andrea Perreault, former coordinator of the Statewide Youth Awareness Programs, helped set up a program in Everett, a city north of Boston. Perreault says the program made a noticeable difference in the high school. "You saw posters, pennants and other symbols of educational opportunity and awareness. Students were carrying the message."

The Center also helped launch an early awareness program in the schools in Lowell, a city where textile mills now sit vacant. Staff trained people and contributed materials for middle school use. After the program was successfully piloted in one middle school, other schools wanted to be included and outside funds were raised. Now, all nine of Lowell's middle schools offer six-week awareness programs. The Center continues to offer materials at no cost.

Although high school counselors were at first wary and even a little critical of the Center, they now recognize its contribution.

In working with the guidance counselors, the Center walks a tightrope between support and interference. Ann Coles is quick to point out: "We do not see ourselves replacing counselors." Coles goes on, "We complement what counselors do. Counselors today are preoccupied with the life crises of urban children; we're another pair of hands."

Boston guidance counselor Wayne Martin describes the feelings of many Massachusetts residents. "More people are going to college because of the Center. I could not imagine Boston without the Center."

Recent studies confirm the Center's impact.

A 1990 study by staff examined the Center's programs for Hispanic students and parents; it found that services for this population had significantly increased over a five-year period. A comprehensive review of the Center's programs by its member colleges praised the Center's staff and youth outreach programs.

Another study contrasted eighth graders who had participated in educational awareness programs with students who had not. Significantly more students who had participated planned to enroll in college preparatory programs in high school than those who did not participate. Hispanic students who participated in early awareness programs were more likely to aspire to graduate from college and attain college level occupations than those who did not participate. Also, students participating in early awareness programs believed their teachers had much higher expectations for them than did students who did not participate. These findings were based on responses from 974 students from eight schools in four different cities.

"We do not see ourselves replacing counselors. We complement what counselors do. Counselors today are preoccupied with the life crises of urban children; we're another pair of hands."

"These differences indicate something is happening in the schools with early educational awareness programs that is not happening in other schools," concluded the report. "This is significant. Putting students on an educational path that meshes with their career and educational aspirations is critical to ensuring that they remain engaged with their studies. It also enhances the likelihood that they will achieve these aspirations."

Clearly the Center is fulfilling its mission of reaching out to populations which frequently do not consider higher education. These studies also underscore the importance of outreach and early awareness activities to make low-income and minority populations aware of educational opportunities.

"When people from other parts of the country hear about the Center, they love the idea. It's made a big difference."

— Grace Bartini, Associate Director,
Massachusetts Education Finance Agency

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Replicating The Center

The success of the Higher Education Information Center has attracted national attention. Every year, the Center is approached by groups who want to create similar programs in their own communities.

For educators and citizens interested in establishing a center in their own community, consider the following steps.

Assess your community's needs and resources. In Boston, this process happened in the summer of 1983 when ASA conducted its study. ASA contacted service agencies throughout Boston to determine where related services existed and met with representatives from schools, colleges and community agencies to measure interest in a center.

The ASA report listed specific needs that could be met by a higher education information center as well as potential sources of support. Needs included: a clearing house of information, an accessible location, a source of professional development activities, an organization for coordinating publicity and outreach activities and a mechanism to ensure continued coordination of programs and activities.

Build a support base. Without the backing of established community leaders, the effort is likely to fail. The Center benefited from the enthusiasm of well-known leaders whose influence attracted support from foundations, colleges and universities, public schools and government. Coles says, "People don't understand the concept right away and it's not compelling to them. You need credible people on your team from the beginning."

Without the backing of established community leaders, the effort is likely to fail.

Just as important is a network of dedicated workers and relevant community organizations. In Boston, the Center founders built on broad-based community concern and commitment to access higher education.

"You've got to have broad-based support," says Coles. "Include groups representing people of color, the public schools, guidance counselors, parents, community agencies, all the organizations that represent the constituencies that the center will serve directly or indirectly. This involvement helps establish the credibility of a center and keeps the service responsive to the needs of the community."

To ensure their support, suggests Coles, discuss the plans for a center with such groups from the beginning. Once the project is underway, continue to keep them informed and involve them in planning. The Center set up its advisory committee as one way to keep the lines of communication open.

Articulate your goals. An important first step is formulating a clear mission statement. The first sentence of the ASA report defines the mission as: "Providing students and adults with information on higher education, as well as encouraging them to attend, is both a growing national concern to promote an educated society and an economic reality for the survival of our colleges and universities."

As with any organization, the Center's mission has evolved from its original intent. While access to educational opportunities remains at the core of the Center's mission, how to accomplish this goal has become better defined over time. One Center hallmark is its comprehensive, inclusive approach to addressing this mission. The Center goes beyond giving information about higher education; it also helps its clients find GED programs and set career goals, both first steps toward preparing for further education and making sound choices. It travels beyond local high schools to hospitals, housing projects and other non-traditional settings.

The Center has never lost sight of the people that need its help the most. Its programs clearly target these populations.

Determine what factors influence your ability to achieve goals. As you map your program, it's crucial to understand what factors will both impede and enhance your success. The creators of the Center recognized the numerous difficulties they faced. These included a school system that was having an increasingly hard time meeting the needs of its students and an expanding population of at-risk students.

The Center goes beyond giving information about higher education; it also helps its clients find GED programs and set career goals.

Just as the early 1980s presented challenges to the Center's founders, there were also opportunities. The Boston Compact presented a model of collaboration to reshape Boston's educational opportunities. The dissonance and pain surrounding the court order

and desegregation plan created an awareness of Boston's educational problems and needs. This, in turn, helped nurture support from many sources; among them the Boston School Committee, local colleges and universities, and businesses.

Establish a plan and a timetable. Bob Schwartz recommends: "Have an overall plan. The program should fit within a larger design. People could see it as a piece of a comprehensive strategy."

Map out your first six months in advance. "Set goals that are realistic but ambitious, that are achievable and challenging," says Coles. Then, establish the steps needed to accomplish these goals. Be flexible when setting these goals — be open to new opportunities that come along.

But don't belabor the planning process, advises Coles. "You must move quickly. If you spend too much time planning, you will miss opportunities. To raise money, you have to do concrete things quickly, or people lose interest. Pick a target that will demonstrate what you want to do and go for it."

Estimate the cost of each strategy and identify resources. Once you set a course, begin to determine a budget. Although many expenses will be sweat equity or in-kind donations, others will require real dollars. You will need to tailor programs to needs and resources.

When creating a budget, base it on the cost of the programs and services you plan to offer. "That's what funders want to know," Coles says, explaining that dollars for maintaining basic operations are difficult to obtain.

Assess your progress. From the beginning, you will want clear, measurable goals. Keep good data so you can measure progress over time. Data also can help you raise dollars from funders: donors want to know whether the program is working.

Use this information to refine your programs, add new services, change services that are no longer relevant and eliminate programs that are not working. "You always need to be looking at how to maintain the integrity of your programs; you do that by constantly examining them critically," Coles says.

While the Center has conducted its own studies to measure program effectiveness, staff has also relied on external evaluators. Three years ago, Haviland Associates evaluated services provided to people visiting the Center, as well as the Career and Learning Line and EOC components. This past winter, member colleges completed an evaluation that examined adult and youth programs and college interaction.

"Have an overall plan. The program should fit within a larger design. People could see it as a piece of a comprehensive strategy."

Find partners. Collaborating with others is key to success.

"Bring in the entire school system, including the teachers' union, the business roundtable, the chamber of commerce, admissions and financial aid officers," advises Joe Cronin. "It's got to be a coalition — public and private; elementary, secondary and higher education. You need to work in harmony."

Engage school people early on. You need to win the trust of school staff — you don't get anywhere unless this happens. Include parents in planning and staffing. This has a multiplier effect: you reach all sorts of people this way.

One way to start a center is to take smaller, existing programs and consolidate them. This method is cost-effective, because it brings together programs with common goals and information bases and enables you to be more responsive to the needs of the community. The job of outreach and publicity is simplified if only one organization exists. Always make sure that you are not duplicating another organization's efforts.

"A coalition is important so that several groups feel invested in your work," explains Coles. "Then they're willing to get out and hustle. We looked for existing programs that shared our mission but weren't everything they could be. We got them to join forces. We made sure that the Career and Learning Line, EOC, and Displaced Homemakers' didn't lose their identities. We helped them reach more people."

Be visible. Without positive publicity and extensive outreach, your efforts will wither. Successful outreach efforts are crucial to make sure your center is visible to its potential users. As one Boston high school guidance counselor notes, "It's no good if people don't know about it."

Select staff people carefully. When hiring personnel, remember that they are the link between your mission statement and your clientele. One of the reasons for the Center's success is its sensitive and dedicated staff. As one Boston public school guidance counselor notes, "People can see themselves in the counselors; they empathize.

"It's got to be a coalition — public and private; elementary, secondary and higher education. You need to work in harmony."

It's comfortable. They make you believe in yourself."

Find the right setting. "Housing the Center at a public library was genius," says Peter Fellenz, president of Haviland Associates. Not only does a library reinforce information sharing, but the downtown location is accessible to people from all parts of the city.

"The Center is in the daily path of city folk," says Mario Peña. The Roxbury satellite location at the Dudley branch of the Library is convenient for Mattapan, Dorchester and Roxbury residents and to public transportation.

Network with other professionals nationwide. Don't try to reinvent the wheel if it's been created already. Contact people in other cities and states who have developed successful programs. Attend national conferences, read national publications — there are many models out there to learn about. "A lot of what we're doing at the Center started with ideas we picked up from other places," Coles says. "That's been very important."

The Center is forming a network of groups which offer similar programs, and a national conference is being planned. "Part of my role as director includes an overall commitment to others with similar interests," Coles says. "We want to let other people know what we're doing, be available to talk to others and be a resource to them."

Be strategic in your funding and fund-raising. Coles offers these insights:

- Articulate to different sectors how your project benefits their self interest — groups or causes that they think are important. Then you need to be responsive to those groups.

- Create a diversified funding base so that when one source dries up, you can still keep going. Be constantly on the look out for new sources. If you're successful, more people will look for your help and then you will need more money. Always be prepared to manage with less and at same time, keep looking for more.

- Take advantage of federal and state grant programs. Center staff members are active, for example, in national and regional organizations of TRIO professionals. Remember, with each funding source goes responsibility to ensure that these funds continue to exist in the future.

- Tailor your programs to the needs in your community. Don't change direction because money is available for different services. You don't want the availability of resources alone to drive the program because that might compromise its integrity. This requires a

"A lot of what we're doing at the Center started with ideas we picked up from other places. That's been very important."

certain amount of toughness, because it will be tempting to steer away from the original plan. Instead, identify the most likely sources of support for the functions your community needs, and go after them.

Coles freely admits that much of successful resource gathering and fund-raising is timing and luck. At the time she was setting up the Center, the Boston Public Library was in a period of transition. Boston had a new mayor who was anxious to have the Library become more community focused. The idea of a higher education information center appeared right at that time.

Another critical component to success is evaluating current trends and translating them into new programs. For example, when the Center staff observed the increasing Hispanic and Asian populations in Massachusetts, they began planning to adjust services appropriately.

"The Center meets a universal need," says Judy Allen. "The numbers increase each year, but it's like a bottomless pit. Instead of being overwhelmed, the Center meets the need, the never-ending, expanding need."

This need is growing exponentially around the country. Every city and every state could benefit from a place like the Higher Education Information Center. With a healthy mix of commitment, energy and vision — and the example set by the Boston model — perhaps this approach will start educating, preparing and training the nation's youth and adults in need of more education for a better life, and narrow that chasm separating lower income and minority populations from educational opportunity.

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Until 1991, Dalton worked as Director of Enrollment Planning at Middlebury. Dalton was also a director of both the National College Counseling and Gulf County College Counseling Projects. (Colgate BA, Middlebury MA, Harvard EdM, Harvard EdD.)

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Boston University
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